The Honorable Christine Kehoe  
Chair, Senate Appropriations Committee  
State Capitol, Room 5050  
Sacramento, CA 95814  

SUBJECT: AB 540 (Beall, Jr.) Alcohol and Drug Screening for Pregnant Women - SUPPORT

Dear Senator Kehoe:

On behalf of First 5 LA, I am writing in support of AB 540, a bill to establish the Medi-Cal Alcohol and Drug Screening and Brief Intervention Services Program for Medi-Cal beneficiaries who are pregnant women. First 5 LA strongly believes that pregnant women should receive alcohol and drug screening in order to support the health of their child and, whenever possible, effective intervention services should be made available to those who need it.

First 5 LA, a child advocacy and public grantmaking organization, was created by California voters to invest Proposition 10 tobacco tax revenues to improve the lives of children from prenatal through age five in Los Angeles County. We recognize the importance of screening pregnant women for alcohol and drug use to help prevent fetal alcohol syndrome and other birth defects as well as to help prevent child neglect and abuse. In fact, promoting reductions in drug, alcohol and tobacco use by parents and caregivers of young children is one of the ten goals of the First 5 L.A. Public Policy Agenda.

Currently, state alcohol and drug screening services not covered by Medi-Cal are passed off onto the counties; however, the counties cannot get matching funds from the federal government for supplying these services. AB 540 would allow the counties to receive federal funds for the services they already provide. By allowing this, the bill would increase the number of women that receive alcohol and drug screening and brief intervention services.

The early identification and education of pregnant women regarding the use and abuse of drugs and alcohol during pregnancy can make a dramatic difference to the outcome of their pregnancies, especially brain development. By targeting low-income women who qualify for Medi-Cal, this bill may help reduce future gaps in the academic achievement of their children.
First 5 LA strongly supports AB 540 and its effort to improve the health and welfare of pregnant women in California. If we can be of assistance with regard to this legislation or other policy issues, please contact Tessa Charnofsky, Government Affairs Manager, at 213-482-7555 or icharnofsky@first5la.org.

Sincerely,

Evelyn V. Martinez
Chief Executive Officer

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